

# What You Need To Know About Bioterrorism

A Message from

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The Massachusetts Department of Public Health, the Boston Public Health Commission, and our many partners in health, safety, and law enforcement, are committed to protecting the public from bioterrorism. This is a time for all residents of Massachusetts to work together – families, friends, and neighbors – to learn the facts and fight fear, the most infectious terrorist weapon of all.

Here is what we know. To date, there have been no bioterrorism events in Massachusetts. In several other states, cases of anthrax have been associated with materials sent through post offices to high-profile media outlets and high-ranking government officials. In recent days, there have been additional cases in which the source of exposure is still being investigated. These events have created understandable concern and uncertainty. We believe that timely and accurate information is essential, especially in uncertain times. Here are some things to keep in mind:

## **Risk to the general public remains very low.**

- Anthrax is not spread from person to person.
- Exposure to anthrax does not necessarily mean that infection occurs.
- If there is known exposure to anthrax, infection can be prevented if treatment is initiated.

## **If bioterrorism occurs in Massachusetts, we will respond immediately.**

- Health officials and health care providers are on full alert, monitoring for any unusual health activity.
- Emergency response plans are in place.
- All reports of possible bioterrorism will continue to be investigated.
- If there is evidence of a health threat, the source will be identified, everyone who may be at risk will be contacted, and appropriate medical follow-up will be available.

## **Here's what you can do.**

- Take a common sense approach to dealing with suspicious materials or objects. Mail and other things that come from a known business or individual and are not accompanied by a threat, are unlikely to present any unusual health risk. If there is a question, information is available on the Massachusetts Department of Public Health's website or by calling the public information line at 1-866-627-7968.
- Leave suspicious substances or possibly contaminated material alone. Don't bring it into the police station, fire station, health department, hospital, clinic, or doctor's office – call 911.
- Don't stockpile antibiotics for anthrax. Antibiotics are readily available in case of emergency, but are neither necessary nor recommended unless there is a known exposure. In fact, inappropriate use of antibiotics can cause negative side effects, and lead to drug resistant bacteria.
- Take especially good care of yourself during this stressful time. Spend time with friends and loved ones. Reduce stress levels by exercising regularly, eating a healthy diet, and getting enough sleep.
- Familiarize yourself with the many resources available that address questions and concerns about bioterrorism, emergency response, and health. By staying informed and putting possible health risks in proper perspective, together we can help protect our families, our communities, and ourselves.

### **FOR ADDITIONAL INFORMATION, PLEASE REFER TO THESE WEBSITES**

Massachusetts Department of Public Health <http://www.state.ma.us/dph/>  
The Boston Public Health Commission <http://www.bphc.org>  
Massachusetts Emergency Management Agency <http://www.state.ma.us/mema/>  
Massachusetts Department of Fire Services <http://www.state.ma.us/dfs/>  
The Federal Bureau of Investigation <http://www.fbi.gov>  
US Postal Service <http://www.USPS.com>  
The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention <http://www.cdc.gov/>  
The American Red Cross  
<http://www.redcross.org/services/disaster/keepsafe/unexpected.html>



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